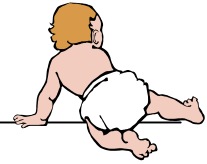




Preventing Choking in Infants and Young Children



Choking on food is a major cause of fatal injury in young children. Every five days a child in the United States dies from choking on food. Caregivers working with young children need to be aware of risky foods and eating behaviors, and how to prevent choking.

Children Under Age 4 are at Greatest Risk

Infants and young children tend to put everything in their mouths, yet they do not have the molar teeth to chew properly. They are therefore at the highest risk of choking on food from birth through 3 years of age and remain at high risk until about 4 years of age when their chewing and swallowing abilities improve.

Risky Eating Behaviors

Certain eating behaviors or situations increase an infant's or child's risk of choking on food. These include:

- Propping a bottle in the infant's mouth.
- Giving an infant a bottle with a nipple that has too large a hole.
- Feeding solid foods before the infant is developmentally ready.
- Feeding the infant too quickly.
- Feeding while the infant or child is walking, playing, talking, laughing, crying or lying down.
- Serving difficult-to-chew foods to infants and children with poor chewing and swallowing abilities.
- Feeding foods that may cause choking
- Feeding the infant or child without close supervision.


High Risk Foods


Many of the foods associated with choking are well liked by young children. A food's potential to cause choking is usually related to one or more of the following characteristics: size, shape and consistency.


Size – Both large and small pieces of food can cause choking. Small pieces of food, especially those less than half an inch in diameter, most frequently cause choking because they are small enough to get into the airway if children try to swallow them before they are properly chewed (e.g., nuts and seeds). Larger pieces of food, though more difficult to swallow, may be harder to chew and more likely to completely block the airway if inhaled.

Shape – Round foods, which are shaped like a sphere or a cylinder (e.g., grapes, hot dogs, popcorn, and round candies like gumdrops or sour balls), may cause choking because they are likely to block the airway more completely than other shapes.

Consistency – Several consistencies of food are more likely to cause choking, including:

- ***Firm, smooth or slippery foods that slide down the throat before chewing, like:*** hotdogs, grapes, hard candy, raw peas, peanuts. 

- ***Small, dry or hard foods that are difficult to chew and easy to swallow whole, like:*** popcorn, pretzels, potato and corn chips, nuts and seeds, small pieces of raw carrots. 

- ***Sticky or tough foods that do not break apart easily and are hard to remove from the airway like:*** peanut butter, tough meat, raisins and other dried fruit, caramel candy 

Help Prevent Choking



Caregivers working with young children need to take the steps necessary to make food safe and protect children from choking. Every child is different. One child may be able to eat certain foods better than another child of the same age. Remember that young children can sometimes choke on foods that are usually safe.

When feeding infants:

- Hold infants while giving them a bottle.
- Make sure the hole in the nipple of the bottle is not too large.
- Avoid using teething pain relief medicine at meal times since it may interfere with chewing.
- Serve food that are appropriate for the child's development.

Watch children during meals and snacks to make sure they:

- Sit quietly in an upright position.
- Eat slowly.
- Chew food well before swallowing.
- Eat small portions at one time.

Fix table foods so they are easy to chew:

- Grind up tough foods.
- Cut food into small pieces or thin slices.
- Cut round foods, like hotdogs, into short strips rather than round pieces.
- Cut grapes into quarters lengthwise.
- Take out all bones from fish, chicken and meat.
- Cook food until it is soft.
- Take out seeds and pits from fruits.
- Avoid nuts or seeds unless finely ground or chopped.
- Do not serve peanut butter until the child is one year old, then spread it thinly.



First Aid for Choking

If the child is choking but can breathe, call the rescue squad and until help comes:

- Keep the child calm
- Have the child sit down and cough.
- Do not slap the child on the back.
- So not give the child a drink
- Do not hold the child upside down.

If the child cannot breathe, cough, speak or cry:

- Follow the first aid for choking taught by the American Red Cross. For additional information, contact the Connecticut Red Cross at (877) 287-3327 or visit their web site at www.ctredcross.org/.

Summary

Choking can occur anytime and anywhere there is food. Child care settings can help protect children from choking by avoiding or modifying at-risk foods, providing close supervision of mealtimes and encouraging young children to eat meals sitting quietly. Following these guidelines will help ensure that meal time remains a safe time for young children.



Resources

Feeding Infants: A Guide for Use in the Child Care Food Program (FNS-258), U. S. Department of Agriculture, 2002.
www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Resources/feeding_infants.html

Making Food Healthy & Safe for Children, National Center for Education in Maternal and Child Health, 1997.

Nutrition Update: Preventing Young Children From Choking on Food, Number 2, October 1988, USDA.